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ABSTRACT

Women of Hispanic origin are one of the fastest-growing population groups in the United States, increasing from 6.2 million in 1986 to 9.6 million in 1996. The largest segment of this population is of Mexican origin, followed by Puerto Rican origin, Cuban origin, and other Spanish descent. As a group, women of Hispanic origin are younger than those of other ethnic groups. About 8 percent of the women in the civilian labor force in 1996 were of Hispanic origin, about 50-60 percent of this population, but the number of Hispanic-origin women who are employed is growing rapidly. Teenage Hispanic women were more likely to be unemployed than those of other origins, and older Hispanic-origin women also had higher rates of unemployment than other groups. Most women of Hispanic origin were employed in the technical, sales, and administrative support and service occupations, partly because only a little more than half of these women had a high school diploma, and few had college degrees. As a consequence, their wages tended to be lower than those of other groups. Families maintained by women, about 12 percent of Hispanic families, had the lowest incomes. (KC)

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Facts on Working Women

U.S. Department of Labor
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WOMEN OF HISPANIC ORIGIN IN THE LABOR FORCE

Women of Hispanic origin[1] are one of the fastest growing population groups in the nation. In 1986, here were 6.2 million Hispanic women age 16 years and over in the United States. By the end of 1996, there were 9.6 million (see Table 1). The largest subgroup continues to be women of Mexican origin (5.7 million) followed by women of Puerto Rican origin (1.1 million), and women of Cuban origin (485,000). The remaining 2.3 million were of other Spanish descent.[2]

Between 1986 and 1996, Hispanic women's population increased by 54.1 percent, compared with 18.1 percent for black women and 7.1 percent for white women. During this period, Mexican women recorded a population gain of 2.1 million--the largest among all Hispanic origin women, while Puerto Rican and Cuban women experienced gains of 264,000 and 65,000, respectively. When looking at the three major groups of Hispanic women, only Puerto Rican women outnumbered their male counterparts in 1996. There were 1.1 million women compared with 809,000 men.

Table 1
Population of Hispanic Origin Women
16 Years and Older, 1986 and 1996
(numbers in thousands)

	1986	1996	Change 1986-1996	Percent Change
All Hispanic Women	6,238	9,610	3,372	54.1
Mexican women	3,605	5,704	2,099	58.2
Puerto Rican women	829	1,093	264	31.8
Cuban women	420	485	65	15.5
Other Spanish decent	1,384	2,328	944	68.2

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1987 and 1997.

[1] Hispanic origin refers to all persons who identify themselves as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, or other Hispanic origin. Persons of Hispanic Origin can be of any race.

[2] Includes persons of Central or South American and of other Hispanic origin.

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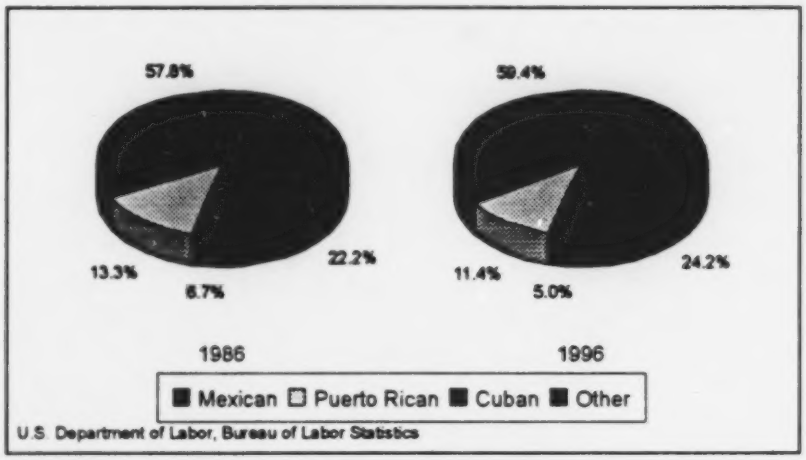
Figure 1
Percentage Distribution of Hispanic Origin Women, 1986 and 1996



While all groups of Hispanic women experienced population gains between 1986 and 1996, only Mexican women increased their share of the total population (see **Figure 1**).

Hispanics, as a group, are younger than all other ethnic groups--10 years younger than non-Hispanics. The median age for Hispanic women in 1996 was 26.8 years compared with 27.7 years for American Indian women, 30.9 years for black women, 31.6 years for Asian and Pacific Islander women, and 37.9 years for white women.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION--Of the 61.9 million women in the civilian labor force in 1996, 4.9 million (8.3 percent) were of Hispanic origin. The labor force participation rate for Cuban women was 53.3 percent; for Mexican women, 52.8 percent; and for Puerto Rican women, 47.4 percent. Cuban women have had participation rates above 50 percent throughout the 1980s and 1990s, except in 1993 when their rate dropped to 47.9 percent. Since the mid-1980s, Mexican origin women have participated at or above the 50 percent level. Puerto Rican origin women continue to participate at a rate less than 50 percent (see **Table 2**). Their lower participation rate can be partially attributed to their younger ages, fewer years of education, and a greater number of dependent children to rear than women of the other Hispanic groups.

During the recession of 1990 and 1991, labor force participation rates for most women remained steady or displayed a slight drop (see **Table 2**). Post-recession participation rates have shown a slow but steady rise for all women.

Hispanic women continue to have lower participation rates than white and black women (see **Table 2**). When viewed collectively, however, Hispanic women and men participated in the labor force nearly at nearly the same rate as whites (66.5 percent compared to 67.2 percent) and at a higher rate than blacks--(66.5 percent compared to 64.1 percent). This was possible because Hispanic men had noticeably higher participation rates than white or black men--79.6 percent as compared with 75.8 percent for white men and 68.7 percent for black men in 1996.

Table 2
Labor Force Participation Rates of Hispanic, White, and Black Women, Selected Years

Women	1986	1990	1991	1992	1996
All Women	55.3	57.5	57.4	57.8	59.3
Hispanic	**50.1**	**53.0**	**52.3**	**52.6**	**53.4**
Mexican	50.5	52.8	51.5	52.1	52.8
Puerto Rican	38.1	42.8	45.9	47.1	48.5
Cuban	56.9	55.9	52.8	50.3	53.3
White	55.1	57.5	57.4	57.8	59.1
Black	56.9	57.8	57.0	58.0	60.4

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1987, 1992, 1993, and 1997.

Teenage Hispanic origin women (16-19 years of age) accounted for only eight percent of the total female Hispanic labor force, however, they represented 17 percent of all unemployed Hispanic women and 13 percent of those not in the labor force. They also participated in the job market at a lower rate than their white counterparts--36.5 percent compared with 54.7 percent. Teenage Hispanic and black women have very similar participation rates--36.5 percent and 38.9 percent, respectively.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected that the female Hispanic labor force should grow from 4.8 million in 1994 to about 6.9 million in 2005 and that their labor force participation rate will be 53.6 percent. This 43 percent increase will be the greatest among all other groups of women or men, excluding Asian and Pacific Islander women, whose percentage increase will be about 45 percent.

The number of Hispanic women outside the labor force has been increasing steadily over the past decade at a rate of about 137,000 women per year. Even though slightly more than half--5.1 million out of 9.6 million--Hispanic women were either working or looking for work 1996, a very large number--4.5 million--were not in the labor force. Any person not in the labor force is classified as keeping house, going to school, unable to work, or not in the labor force for other reasons.

Table 3
Employment Status of Hispanic Women,
16 Years of Age and Over, 1996 Annual Averages
(numbers in thousands)

	All Hispanic Women[1]	Mexican Origin Women	Puerto Rican Origin Women	Cuban Origin Women
Civilian noninstitutional population	9,610	5,704	1,093	485
Civilian labor force	5,128	3,011	529	259
Percent of population	53.4	52.8	48.5	53.3
Employed	4,602	2,680	472	237
Unemployed	525	331	57	22
Unemployment rate	10.2	11.0	10.8	8.3
Not in labor force	4,482	2,693	563	226

[1]Includes persons of Central or South American origin and of other Hispanic origin, not shown separately.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1997.

EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT--Hispanic women are one of the fastest growing groups of working women in the United States. Their total employment increased 65 percent over the past ten years--from 2.8 million in 1986 to 4.6 million in 1996. Of this 4.6 million, 2.6 million were of Mexican descent; 472,000 were of Puerto Rican origin; 237,000 were of Cuban origin; and the remaining 1.2 million were of various Central or South American origin.

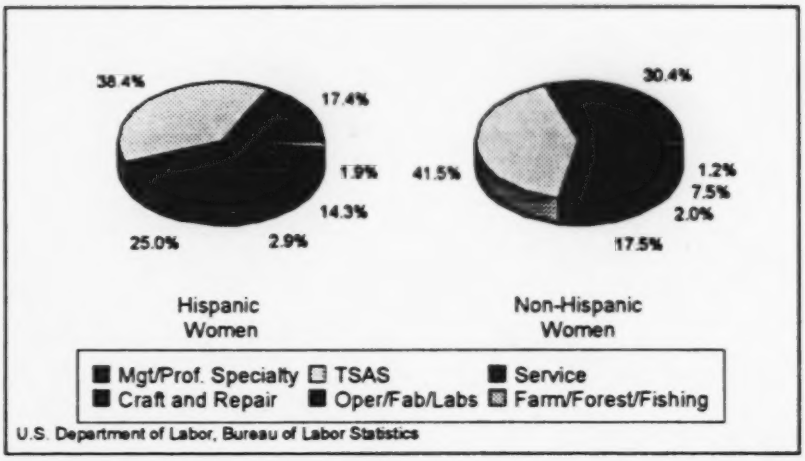
Unlike their black and white counterparts, Hispanic women did not experience the small downturn in total employment during the recession period between 1990 and 1991--a result of their occupational distribution. Just as in 1991, two thirds of employed Hispanic women worked in technical, sales, and administrative support jobs **(39 percent)** and in service occupations **(26 percent)**--occupations that tend to suffer the least during economic downturns. Their employment numbers actually rose each year between 1986 and 1996.

Double digit unemployment continued to plague Mexican and Puerto Rican women in 1996--11.0 percent for Mexican women and 10.8 percent for Puerto Rican. Cuban women, who generally have **higher educational attainment** than their Hispanic female counterparts and are **typically older,** had a lower unemployment rate--8.3 percent in 1996.

The unemployment rate for teenage Hispanic women was 25.1 percent in 1996. Contributing to the high unemployment rate for Hispanic teenagers--female, as well as male--is their higher high school dropout rate. In addition, many may have trouble communicating in English.

OCCUPATIONS--In 1996, 4.6 million Hispanic women were job holders. Just as with black women, the largest share were employed in the technical, sales, and administrative support (TSAS) and service (SERV) occupations. Large numbers of white women worked in TSAS jobs, but contrary to Hispanic and black women, white women were more likely to work in managerial and professional jobs.

Figure 2
Occupational Distribution of Employed Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Women, 1996



In 1996, half of the ten leading occupations of Hispanic women were in **sales and administrative support**, while the remaining were **service** jobs, excluding managers and administrators, not elsewhere cited and textile sewing machine operators **(see Table 4 and Table 5)**. These two occupational groups accounted for nearly two-thirds of total employment for Hispanic origin women. Most jobs in these categories require few skills, little training, and offer low wages.

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, secretaries, cashiers, and retail/personal services workers are among the occupations projected to experience large job growth between 1994 and 2005. Hispanic and non-Hispanic women employed as full-time wage and salary workers in these occupations, however, had median weekly earnings of only $240-$406 in 1996. Here is a brief list of occupations projected to experience abundant employment opportunities through the year 2005 and that had median weekly earnings over $400 in 1996--registered nurses; systems analysts; elementary and secondary school teachers; social workers; lawyers; and financial managers.

Table 4
Occupational Distribution of Employed Hispanic, White, and Black Women, 1996

Occupational Group	Hispanic Women	White Women	Black Women
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Management and professional specialty	17.4	**31.5**	22.8
Technical, sales and administrative support	**38.4**	**41.9**	**38.4**
Service	**25.0**	16.3	**25.4**
Precision, production, craft, and repair	2.9	2.0	2.2
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	14.3	6.9	11.0
Farming, forestry, and fishing	1.9	1.3	0.2

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, January 1996 and unpublished tabulations from the Current Population Survey, 1996 Annual Averages.

Table 5
10 Leading Occupations of Hispanic Origin Women, 1996
(numbers in thousands)

Occupations	Number Employed
1. Cashiers* (TSAS)	222
2. Secretaries* (TSAS)	189
3. Sales workers, retail and personal services (TSAS)*	165
4. Janitors and cleaners* (SERV)	142
5. Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants* (SERV)	123
6. Textile sewing machine operators	116
7. Cleaners and servants, private household (SERV)	100
7 Cooks (SERV)	100
8. Managers and administrators, n.e.c.	93
9. Sales supervisors and proprietors (TSAS)	90
10. Bookkeepers, accounting and auditing clerks (TSAS)	84

* Occupation projected to have large job growth.
n.e.c. not elsewhere classified.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

EARNINGS AND INCOME--**Earnings** include total money wages or salary received for work performed as an employee. Hispanic women who worked year-round, full-time had median earnings of $17,178 in 1995--84 percent of what their male counterparts earned ($20,379); 83 percent of what black women earned ($20,665); and 75 percent of what white women earned ($22,911).

Income is the sum of earnings plus the amounts received from wages and salaries, self-employment income (including losses), social security, supplemental security income, public assistance, interest, dividends, rent, royalties, estates, trusts, veteran's payments, unemployment and worker's compensation, retirement and disability pensions, alimony, child support, and any other source of money income that is regularly received. Hispanic women who worked year-round, full-time had a median income of $17,855 in 1995--87 percent of what their male counterparts earned ($20,553); 85 percent of what black women earned ($21,079); and 74 percent of what white women earned ($24,264).

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT--In 1996, 46 percent of all Hispanic women age 25 and older had less than a high school diploma. Twenty-seven percent were high school graduates, with no college; 13 percent had some college, but no degree; 9 percent were college graduates; and 5 percent had associate degrees. Since nearly half of all Hispanic women do not have a high school diploma, this helps explain their concentration in sales, administrative support, and service jobs and their low median annual earnings (See previous sections on **Occupations** and **Earnings and Income**).

Of all Hispanic women age 25 and over who were labor force participants in 1996, 32 percent had less than a high school diploma; 31 percent were high school graduates with no college; 17 percent had some college but no degree; 8 percent had an associate's degree; and the remaining 12 percent were college graduates.

For Hispanic women, as for all women, with higher educational attainment, labor force participation rises and unemployment decreases. In 1996, Hispanic women who had less than a high school diploma participated at a rate of 38 percent; high school graduates, with no college, 62.8 percent; and college graduates, 75.6 percent. Hispanic women with less than a high school diploma had an unemployment rate of 13.4 percent; high school graduates, with no college, 7 percent; and college graduates, 4.2 percent.

FAMILIES MAINTAINED BY WOMEN--Of the 12.2 million families maintained by women in the U.S. in 1995, 1.5 million (12.2 percent) were Hispanic. Between 1985 and 1995, the number of Hispanic families maintained by women grew from 905,000 to 1.5 million--a 64 percent increase. Women maintained a quarter of all Hispanic families (1,485,000 out of 6,200,000). The average size of Hispanic families maintained by women was between three to four persons.

Of all family types, those maintained by women had the lowest median income. In 1995, the median income for Hispanic families maintained by women with no husband present was only $13,474; for families with a male householder and no wife present, $22,257; and for married-couple families, $29,861. Families maintained by Hispanic women had lower median incomes than similar black and white families--$13,474 as compared with $15,004, and $22,068, respectively.

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